

January 24, 2006

**Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS)
Detected in a Lake St. Clair Muskellunge**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources received notification on December 23, 2005, that the North American Strain of the Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) virus was isolated from a muskellunge caught from the Michigan side of Lake St. Clair in the spring of 2005. While the North American VHS strain is endemic in the Pacific Northwest USA and is occasionally found in fish from the East Coast of Canada, this is the first time VHS has been detected in Michigan waters. In 2005, a similar virus was detected in freshwater drum caught from the Bay of Quinte, Lake Ontario, Ontario, Canada.

Dr. Mohamed Faisal from Michigan State University and Dr. James Winton from the Western Fisheries Research Center have isolated and identified the St. Clair isolate and determined that the virus is definitely a North American strain of VHS. This strain, while a reportable disease to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), has not been associated with any large fish kills. To date, it has been found in the wild in mummichog, stickleback, striped bass, freshwater drum, and brown trout. There is no indication that this virus negatively impacts infected muskellunge or constitutes a threat to public health. This VHS strain appears to be much less virulent to salmon and trout than the European VHS isolates which have harmed the European farmed rainbow trout industry.

Michigan DNR is working closely with Michigan State University, USGS Western Fisheries Research Center, Michigan Department of Agriculture, and the United States Department of Agriculture to identify the extent of the virus spread and to determine what, if any, action is warranted.

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